Book reviews

MUSCLE DISEASES Proceedings of an International Congress. Edited by J. N. Walton, N. Canal, and G. Scarlato. (Pp. xiii + 740; illustrated; £17·50.) Excerpta Medica; Amsterdam. 1970.

This is a very good volume and is one of the most important additions to the proliferating literature on muscle diseases. It has none of the disadvantages that has so often marred the publication of proceedings of international congresses. It is especially commendable that it has appeared soon after the meeting, which was held in Milan in May 1969. The communications are concise, well written (in English even though this was not the native language of some contributors), and brimming with sound and enthusiastic investigative activity. Just under 120 papers from close on 240 authors are contained in the volume. Many of the acknowledged leaders in the multifarious aspects of muscle research from many parts of the world are represented. The majority describe new and outstanding research work and there are also a few distinguished authoritative reviews of particular subjects. Perhaps the most remarkable feature is the uniformly high standard of the illustrations, which must reflect the quality and care of the writers, and one suspects the overriding skill of the editors. It is refreshing to be able to pore over the lavish number of ultramicroscopic photographs and easily identify what is tagged below in the figure legends.

The opening chapter is by Professor Walton who in an excellent way analyses the cardinal signs and symptoms of muscle disease and describes their value in differential diagnosis. This is a realistic beginning, for so often the importance of precision in bedside diagnosis, as far as that is possible, is overlooked and then even the most basic work on diseased muscle may lose some of its validity. The second chapter is a very lucid and comprehensive account of current knowledge on myasthenia gravis by Professor Simpson. There follow sections on histology and histochemistry, electron microscopy, electrophysiology, biochemistry, pathology, genetics, endocrinology, and clinical studies. The volume ends with contributions to a round table discussion on correlations between morphological, metabolic, and functional aspects of developing muscle.

Reading through the individual papers is an exhilarating and humbling experience. Some very good work indeed is being carried out all over the world by careful and dedicated people who have also the facility and willingness to communicate their ideas to others. It would be invidious and unjust to single out scientific papers for special comment, but purely from personal interests we found many of the papers on biochemical changes in diseased muscle, on carrier detection, and on steroid myopathy very valuable and provocative. This elegantly produced, expensive (but good value for money) book should be studied with care by all who are engaged in muscle research. The editors deserve our gratitude for bringing an international congress with so many of the world's brains, so quickly onto the laboratory benches of those who could not attend.

L. J. HURWITZ

THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM By J. Pick. (Pp. 483; illustrated.) Lippincott: Philadelphia.

This large and beautifully illustrated volume describes in detail the autonomic nervous system in an ascending scale of animals, including *Amphioxus lanceolatus*, which is one of the most primitive cordates, fish, amphibia, the cat, monkey, and man. The approach is primarily morphological, and the book deals with gross examination including many painstaking dissections by the author, with light microscopy and with electronmicroscopy. The text is clear, the illustrations ample and well placed in respect to the text, and the general standard of production excellent. The last 100 pages are entitled 'clinical and surgical aspects', and mainly describe techniques for interrupting sympathetic pathways surgically or by injection.

This book is a valuable anatomical contribution and will be particularly helpful to comparative anatomists of the autonomic nervous system. Those whose primary interest is in man will welcome such an elegant presentation, though they may find only a limited amount that has not been readily available before. They will regret that the author considers that so many gaps exist in the accurate knowledge of the autonomic content of the cranial nerves in man that no information is given beyond a promise of better things in future editions (chapter 13). Surely even the most cautious academic judgement must admit that some things are known on this subject with sufficient certainty to justify telling the reader. It may be churlish to criticize a book for what it is not, but in these days a book entitled *The Autonomic Nervous System* may be expected to include much more than anatomy. Advances in physiology and pharmacology in this field in recent decades have been tremendous, and the clinical aspect with which this book claims to deal can not be understood without some reference to them. The index informs us that acetylcholine is mentioned on only one page (page 24). It is here in company with sympathin E and sympathin I. We are promised a discussion on present day concepts of autonomic nerve transmission in chapter 5, but that chapter is entitled 'Histology and Fine Structure of Autonomic Neurons' and abides nobly by this title. Epinephrine (adrenaline) is, according to the index, mentioned on only one page (page 370), and norepinephrine (noradrenaline) not at all. Atropine is apparently not referred to, so it does not come as a surprise that there is no mention of the innumerable drugs which act on the sympathetic nervous system. Similar omissions afflict the clinical section of the book. There are a large number of clinical situations in which disturbances of the autonomic nervous system are important, and a description of these would have been valuable. The only one to receive special mention, however, is the hyperactive